FREE

Astoria of the Fur Traders

ASTORIA
of the
FUR TRADERS

A CHRONOLOGY
1542-1846

By
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ASTORIA, OREGON

1811 — Sesqui-Centennial Year — 1961

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FOREWORD

In the fifteen decades since the founding of Astoria, no chronology of the city had been compiled. This condensation, two years in the research, is an attempt to provide a concise reference, and to relate Astoria's role to state and national history.

The work was undertaken in payment for the privilege of living in Astoria. Infallibility is not claimed. Nor is apology made for not taking the chronology beyond the Boundary Treaty which closed the fur-trading era. One does not become expert on details of 150 years, and this writer's field is confined to aboriginal Indians.

The compiler is indebted to the more than 200 historians, remote and contemporary, whose works were consulted. Resident historians assisted with ships and pioneers. Gratitude is especially expressed to the Clatsop county clerk's office and to the Oregon State library and the Astoria Public library, whose personnel were unfailingly patient in guiding this researcher along the enthralling by-paths of early Oregon.

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1542 Spanish "Galleons of Acapulco" began sailing north from Mexico seeking gold and fabled Northwest Passage.

1578 Francis Drake, British buccaneer, reached mid-Oregon coast, did not land.

1592 Greek pilot Apostolus Valerianos, alias Juan De Fuca, claimed discovery of the Northwest Passage. Historians dispute validity of De Fuca's presence, but strait was later named for him.

1715 River Oregon first appeared as a typographical error on a map in a French version of Baron La Hontan's adventures.

About 1725 Spanish ship wrecked on Clatsop Spit. One version of legend claims a survivor of the wreck was the blacksmith Konapee, for whom Cullaby lake was named.

1738 Russian seamen discovered beauty and value of sea otter fur. Traders of that nation kept the secret for several decades, thus monopolizing the Chinese market.

1741 Vitus Bering, second expedition, landed on Alaskan coast, established a Russian fur-trading post, with activities later extending to California.

1742 Two sons of Chevalier de La Verendrye, Frenchman of Montreal, led a westward overland party seeking Pacific coast. They reached present Montana but were turned back by Indian hostility.

About 1760 English ship wrecked on north Clatsop beach; half-breed son of survivor, with "Jack Ramsey" tattooed on his arm, met by founders of Astoria.

August 17, 1775 Bruno Heceta, Spaniard, discovered mouth of Columbia river, but could not go ashore. Named north shore Cabo San Rocque and south shore Cabo Frondoso (leafy). Named bay at mouth of river Assumption bay, and subsequent Spanish charts showed the estuary as Heceta's inlet.

1788-1792 English seafarers James Cook, John Meares, and George Vancouver, cruised Oregon coast, missed Columbia estuary. Capt. Meares named the north promontory Cape Disappointment.

May 11, 1792 Capt. Robert Gray, Boston fur-trader, entered river, named it for his sailing ship Columbia. Gray's discovery of the long-sought River of the West was a substantial element in the United States' claim to the Oregon Country. All the early explorers traded for sea-otter and beaver skins.

October, 1792 Lt. William R. Broughton, commanding the armed tender Chatham under Vancouver, explored Columbia river 120 miles from its mouth. Broughton named features of the landscape; his mapping formed the basis of the British claim to the area.

Winter of 1794-95 British brig Phoenix out of Bengal believed first to spend winter on lower Columbia rather than wintering in the Sandwich (Hawaiian) islands. Ship later wrecked, log and records lost.

1803 President Jefferson effected Louisiana purchase, furthered plans

for exploration of vast territory between Missouri and Pacific.

Nov. 7, 1805 Lewis and Clark and Sacajawea overland party within sound and sight of the sea.

Dec. 7, 1805 Lewis and Clark moved from north shore to site of Fort Clatsop on Netul (now Lewis and Clark) river, began construction of log shelter, seven rooms and parade ground, 50 by 50 feet. The expedition made salt from sea water. The salt cairn has been reconstructed on Lewis and Clark way in Seaside.

Sunday, March 23, 1806 Lewis and Clark left Fort Clatsop for eastward journey.

1807 Journal of Sgt. Patrick Gass of Lewis and Clark party, published in east. Diary was put into elegant English by David McKeown, West Virginia schoolmaster, in most famous "ghost" writing in American literature.

Spring of 1810 Winship brothers of Boston built trading post and planted garden at Oak Point, near present Mayger. Flood forced abandonment after seven days.

June 23, 1810 Articles of incorporation for Pacific Fur company signed in New York, with John Jacob Astor as financier, and "wintering partners" to do exploring and trading with Indians on Northwest coast.

Sept. 6, 1810 Bark Tonquin, first Astor supply vessel, sailed from New York, with 33 passengers and 21 crewmen. Because of rivalry with British fur-trading companies, Tonquin was escorted out of harbor by U. S. frigate Constitution, "Old Ironsides." There were no women aboard.

March 12, 1811 Overland Astorians under Wilson Price Hunt and Donald McKenzie left St. Louis.

March 22, 1811 Tonquin made landfall at Columbia.

March 25, 1811 Tonquin entered river, after losing eight men in small boats, first drownings at this graveyard of ships. The vessel anchored in Baker's bay.

April 5, 1811 Site of fur-trading post selected on south shore, now a historical park at 15th and Exchange streets in Astoria.

April 12, 1811 Clearing of huge trees began for construction of first permanent white settlement west of Rockies. Named Astoria for head of company, John Jacob Astor, who was never here. U. S. flag of 15 stars and 15 stripes raised on site.

May, 1811 Twelve potatoes, withered from their long sea voyage in the Tonquin, were planted. Yield of first spuds in the Oregon Country was 190.

June 1, 1811 Tonquin sailed to trade with Indians further north, cleared river bar four days later.

About June 14, 1811 At Clayoquot sound on west coast of Vancouver island, entire Tonquin crew and passengers, 27 men, massacred by Indians, ship blown up by crewmen, killing hundreds of Indians.

July 15, 1811 David Thompson of the Northwest Fur company (British), arrived to find that Americans had beaten English by three months in occupancy of land at mouth of Columbia. Starting at headwaters Thompson was first to navigate the entire length of the big river.

Sept. 26, 1811 Large house for company quarters completed at Astoria.

Oct. 2, 1811 Schooner Dolly, first vessel built in Oregon, launched at Astoria. A "pre-fab," her frame was brought in the Tonquin.

Oct. 10, 1811 Second Astor supply ship, Beaver, sailed from New York .

Jan. 1, 1812 Astorians celebrated New Year's day in bright sunshine; overland party traded for horses with Sciatoga Indians on Umatilla river.

January, 1812 First half-white child, a boy, born at Astoria to an Indian mother. The record is silent as to identity of the parents.

Jan. 18, 1812 First overland Astorians, under McKenzie, arrived at mouth of river.

Feb. 15, 1812 Hunt arrived at Astoria,

May 10, 1812 Supply vessel Beaver arrived with supplemental personnel and trading goods.

June 19, 1812 United States declared war on Great Britain; Astorians learned of hostilities some months later.

June 29, 1812 Robert Stuart party left by land to report progress to Astor in New York. Expedition found South Pass and surveyed route that could be used for wagons. Thus the Oregon Trail began at Astoria and went from west to east.

March, 1813 Third Astor supply ship, Lark, sailed from New York, was wrecked south of the Sandwich Islands and never reached here.

May 15, 1813 First account of Tonquin massacre published in Missouri Gazette at St. Louis, after Stuart party arrived overland. Stuart's journal was used by Washington Irving, and remained in the Irving family until 1930, after which it was edited for book publication.

July 11, 1813 Manifesto to abandon the enterprise signed by Astor partners McDougal, McKenzie, Clarke and David Stuart.

September, 1813 Hospital and lodging house, 30 by 45 feet, completed at Astoria. This was the first hospital in Oregon, although there was no graduate doctor in residence during the Pacific Fur company period. Clerk Gabriel Franchere ministered to the ailing.

Oct. 16, 1813 Wintering partners of Pacific Fur company, finding Beaver blockaded in Canton, supply ships blockaded in New York because of war with Britain, and believing situation desperate, sold collected furs to Northwest Fur company.

Oct. 23, 1813 Furs and buildings transferred to British.

Nov. 30, 1813 British sloop of war Raccoon, Capt. Black, arrived to capture fort, but did not fire, when captain learned enterprise had been purchased by English traders.

Dec. 13, 1813 Formal transfer made, union jack hoisted on post buildings. Capt. Black's naval coup later proved diplomatic error. Establishment was re-named Fort George.

1810-1814 Mortality of personnel of the Pacific Fur company was 65 men, more than 30 per cent of the total partners, clerks and voyageurs. The Astor family burned the financial records of the ill-fated venture, but some historians have estimated a loss of $400,000.

April, 1814 Northwest Fur company supply ship, Isaac Todd, brought first doctor, Swan, and first white woman, Jane Barnes, who came as the mistress of Donald McTavish, Northwest partner.

1814 First edition of Lewis and Clark journals, edited by Biddle, published in Philadelphia.

Dec. 24, 1814 Treaty of Ghent ended Napoleonic wars, and, at insistence of President Madison, all lands disputed by U. S. and Britain were restored to possessors at outbreak of war. Thus Astoria reverted to the United States and was legally in British hands for only one year.

1817 Lt. James Biddle, commander of U. S. sloop of war Ontario, arrived with orders to re-possess the trading post. No force used, but Biddle raised the star-spangled banner west of the post, probably near present Smith point. British traders remained in possession of the original fort.

1817 William Cullen Bryant's popular poem Thanatopsis published. The line "or lose thyself in the continuous woods where rolls the Oregon" probably did much to fix the name on the land, though Bryant referred to the Columbia river, rather than the vast area, part of which became the state.

1818 Treaty of joint occupation stipulated that both Britain and the United States might occupy the Oregon country for a period of 10 years.

Feb. 22, 1819 Treaty with Spain established the 42nd parallel as southern boundary of the Oregon Country in favor of the U. S.

1819 Narrative of Gabriel Franchere, Astor clerk who came in the Tonquin, published in French in Montreal. This was the first account of the fur-trading fiasco, from which Washington Irving later plagiarized.

Dec. 19, 1820 Dr. John Floyd of Virginia introduced in Congress a resolution to inquire into the situation of the settlement on the Pacific ocean and the expediency of ocupying the Columbia river. This proposal instigated the first of a long series of debates on the "Oregon Question."

1821 Hudson's Bay company merged with Northwest Fur company and Astoria became headquarters for Columbia district under former name.

April 17, 1824 Treaty between U. S. and Russia established 54-40 north latitude as north boundary of Oregon Country. Russia relinquished all claim to land south of this line in favor of the U. S.

1824 Shalapan, favorite son of Chinook Chief Concomly and intended

heir to the chieftainship, learned to write English under tutelage of HBC clerks at Fort George. This "school" pre-dated the formal classrooms at Fort Vancouver and French Prairie as first in the Oregon country.

1824 Ranald McDonald born at Astoria. This half-Indian son of an HBC partner deliberately cast himself adrift off Japan in 1848, and entered that country five years prior to Admiral Peary.

1824 Mary Rondeau born at Astoria. The granddaughter of Chief Concomly lived until 1911, and was "Grandma Kelly" to many descendants in the lower Columbia. She was the grandmother of J. Grant Elliott, chairman of the Chinook Tribal council at Skamokawa, Wash.

1824 Shalapan was given traditional canoe burial, with a loaded pistol in each dead hand. This was to discourage white men from snatching the artificially flattened skull, a mark of aristocracy among the Chinook Indians. Slaves were "roundheads" since their skulls were not bound in infancy. Flattening of the back of the head would result in near-idiocy, according to a precept of phrenology, in which there was a widespread belief during the nineteenth century.

1825 Chief Concomly abandoned his family home and burial ground at Chinook point on the north shore of the Columbia. In mourning for the death of Shalapan and another son, the chief established his residence in Astoria, approximately at the present intersection of 12th and Exchange streets.

April, 1825 David Douglas, botanist, arrived on the HBC ship William and Anne, and classified at least 150 plants hitherto unknown.

August, 1825 Stores of furs moved from Astoria to tent-site on the north shore of the Columbia east of present Vancouver, Wash. Dr. John McLoughlin, chief HBC factor, ordered immediate re-inforcement of Fort George to protect buildings and supplies. From this time until the Boundary Treaty of 1846, Astoria was continuously occupied by white men as an HBC trading post to keep watch for incoming ships, and to maintain friendly relations with the powerful Indians at the mouth of the great water highway.

September, 1825 Dr. John Scouler, 20-year-old ship's doctor on the HBC vessel William and Anne, decapitated Chinookan bodies to take the heads back to England. Scouler nearly lost his own head when Indians discovered the sacrilege. His diary does not note the grave-robbing, but Douglas' letter tattles.

1827 Captain Dominis, no husbandman, brought first intended breeding sheep to Oregon, but all stock turned out to be wethers. Capt. Dominis' brig Owhyhee was the first American trading ship to enter the river since 1814.

1827 Treaty of joint occupation renewed for an indefinite period, with either the U. S. or Britain privileged to terminate the agreement on 12 months' notice. The U. S. congress on April 28, 1846, did give notice of termination, which led to the Boundary Treaty.

July, 1828 Fort George rebuilt and re-inforced after burning of buildings.

1829-41 Late summers and early autumns saw attacks of "intermittent fever" (possibly a form of malaria) decimate 90 per cent of the Indian population. Many whites were stricken, but there were only a few fatalities among the fur-traders. Indians begged for help, but medicines and doctors were so scarce that the white people had to confine their ministrations to their own personnel. Indians came to the gates of the forts, asking the whites to bury them if they died. Chief Concomly succumbed to the fever in Astoria about 1830, and was buried in a white man's coffin above ground. The mortuary box was supported by five posts probably taken from the chief's longhouse.

1830 Donald Manson named clerk in charge of Fort George.

1831 Narrative of Ross Cox, Astor clerk who came in the Beaver, published in England.

About 1831 Concomly's body was taken from the suspended coffin and buried in the ground, following Indian custom, and possibly at urging of white men to prevent spread of the fever.

Prior to 1835 Chinook Indians who survived the pandemic fever feared the head of the great chief would be irresistible to the white medics, so they dug the body and secreted it in another wooded spot, probably west of the original burial ground, but on the north slope in Astoria. Concomly thus had three burials within a few years of his death.

Autumn, 1835 Dr. Meredith Gairdner, HBC medic enroute to the Sandwich islands for his health, violated a grave he believed to be Concomly's and severed the head to be sent to England for phrenological study. Gairdner died in Hawaii, but the Indian head went to his medical teacher in England to become a museum exhibit until 1952, when it was returned to Astoria. Gairdner's letter stated baldly that the head was Concomly's, but offered no identifying proof. Gairdner's medical egotism would tend to support his claim that he found the right grave.

1836 John Kirk Townsend, who had been caught in an earlier attempt to snatch for science a complete Indian body from a Sauvies island burial tree, visited Astoria and obtained the deformed skull of an unnamed "Chinook chief." This skull is in the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia. The medics who violated graves were interested in the supposed Indian method of embalming, as well as puzzled that flattened skulls could contain shrewd brains.

Dec. 23, 1836 Lt. William A. Slacum, appointed special agent by President Jackson, arrived to investigate the American settlements in the Oregon Country, and strengthen the U. S. claim to the area. Slacum advanced money for Americans to bring cattle from California.

1838 John Dunn named clerk at Fort George. Dunn's narrative, published in England in 1844, was unkind to the "rabble Americans" whom he considered interlopers in British trade territory.

1839 "Peoria Party" of 18 young men left overland for Oregon. Robert Shortess, one of the travelers, was a Clatsop pioneer.

1839 James Birnie named factor in charge of Fort George. As a

matter of HBC policy of friendliness to Americans, Birnie was hospitable to missionaries and farmers on Plains.

May, 1840 Ship Lausanne chartered by the Methodist Mission of New York arrived at Columbia bringing "great reinforcement" of 50 missionaries to convert Indians. The Rev. Joseph H. Frost founded a Methodist mission on Clatsop Plains later that year.

Feb. 18, 1841 Rudiments of Oregon government founded at funeral of Ewing Young in Willamette valley. Josiah L. Parrish, later a Clatsop resident, participated.

1841 Solomon Smith, who came to Oregon with Wyeth in 1832, began first ferry service across the Columbia from Astoria to Point Ellice. Indian canoes were lashed together in catamaran fashion to carry freight.

1841 U. S. naval expedition, under Lt. Charles Wilkes, surveyed northwest waters and lands. A. T. Agate, professional artist with the expedition, drew a sketch of the original gravesite of Concomly in Astoria. Agate's drawing has been widely reprinted.

May 2, 1843 "Divide" meeting at Champoeg formed American government for Oregon. Among those voting for U. S. allegiance in the 52 to 50 balloting were William Henry Gray, Etienne Lucier, Josiah L. Parrish, Robert Shortess, Solomon Smith, Calvin Tibbetts, and Albert E. Wilson. These were then or later American colonists in Clatsop county.

July 5, 1843 Provisional Oregon government proposal of land claim law passed by people. This statute, pre-dating the federal DLC enactment by seven years, provided for platting of Astoria.

Late summer and early fall, 1843 First of the "great migration" of American settlers arrived by the overland Oregon trail. Among pioneers of this year was Thomas Owens, who settled on Clatsop Plains and became the county's first sheriff. His daughter, Bethenia Angelina, was the first woman doctor on the Pacific coast.

1843 John Hobson settled on Clatsop Plains. Twenty years later he built a solid cedar house in Astoria. This charming example of early Victorian architecture survives at the corner of 5th and Bond streets, and is believed to be the only Clatsop county home owned and occupied for nearly a century by descendants of the pioneer builder.

May 23, 1844 The Rev. George Gary, sent by Methodist Mission board to reorganize the Oregon establishments, closed out the Clatsop Plains mission. Near the same site, in September, 1846, Presbyterians established the first church of that sect west of the Rockies in continuous use for more than a century. Beyond the tiny red brick chapel is the burial ground of many of the county's pioneers.

1844 Diary of the Rev. Gary mentions that Factor Birnie showed the missionary party the now-empty burial box of Concomly as a part of a guided tour for these "tourists." The grave-posts and box, however, are not mentioned in the memoirs of the U. S. sloop Shark survivors in 1846.

June 22, 1844 Clatsop district, later county, formed by state provisional government. First county seat, Lexington, now within corporate

limits of Warrenton, was platted in 1848.

Early 1844 John McClure, John N. Shively and Albert E. Wilson, Americans, took land claims on the north slope of Astoria. McClure platted First to 13th streets, Shively from crooked 13th street east to present 32nd street, and Wilson east of 32nd. Shively platted the area around the HBC fort, which was claimed by the British under the treaty of joint occupation. Birnie's enmity forced Shively out of town, but the latter returned in triumph with a presidential commission to open the first U. S. post office west of the Rockies on March 9, 1847.

1844 Polk campaigned with "Fifty-four, forty or fight!" but after election to the presidency compromised to avoid war with England.

June 15, 1846 Boundary treaty established the 49th parallel as the northern limit of the United States in the Pacific Northwest. The agreement finally put into effect the Treaty of Ghent which had legally given Astoria to the United States 32 years earlier.

1846 James Birnie, who had been HBC factor at Astoria continuously since 1839, "retreated" to the north shore to found the town of Cathlamet, Wash. U. S. mail service, customs, government came to Astoria to stay.

Compiler's Editorial Addenda

Before white contact, Chinooks left bodies above ground indefinitely in canoes or mortuary boxes; Indians never violated graveyards. After whites began snatching skulls, Indians hid bodies. Concomly died in abnormal times; nothing about his burial is typical. In six years' research, this writer has not found primary sources on his demise or grave desecration. Even the year of his death is uncertain.

Perhaps Concomly was interred by whites or Indians; his coffin may have been only a memorial, never containing his body. Perhaps the tyee's remains were moved several times, as various legends say. This is interesting speculation. Weight of theory is against Gairdner's finding the right grave. If he did, he achieved the phrenological triumph of the 19th century.

The compiler apologizes for earlier omission of Wilkes' comments. In 1841, Wilkes wrote he saw the "tomb of Concomly, now in ruins. The chief's skull, it is believed, is in Glasgow, having been removed by Dr. Gardner (sic)." Wilkes does not state source of the "belief" and is therefore secondary, perhaps tertiary, documentation.

Gairdner and Wilkes are supported by one creditable oral legend. All lack precise documentation. Yet to be proven is date the skull was incised with its own identity. From 1838 to 1952, its location was known in England; it may not have been on continuous display. In 1938, the skull was photographed by a Canadian visiting Britain. The pre-war photo shows the lower jaw missing.

Born about 1765, Concomly was an enigma to his white contemporaries. His after-death travels by sail, steamer, rail, are an intriguing dilemma in 1961. Two more centuries may be required fully to document his biography, if it ever can be.

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